

**IN THE CLAIMS**

1. (currently amended) An encoding apparatus that encodes for compression a multi-channel signal including digital signals from a plurality of channels by framing the multi-channel signal, determining a number of steps of quantizing data in the frame, and performing entropy coding of the digital signals, the apparatus comprising:

provisional-number-of-in-use-bits calculating means for calculating a sum of code length in a current frame as a provisional number of in-use bits for each channel by making entropy coding of the digital signals based on a provisional number of quantizing steps provisionally determined for quantizing the digital signals;

inter-channel bit allocation means for allocating a number of bits usable for each channel based on a ratio of the provisional number of in-use bits for each channel with a total provisional number of in-use bits, which is a sum of the provisional numbers of the in-use bits for all the plurality of channels, and

number-of-bits adjusting means for adjusting the number of in-use bits based on the number of usable bits allocated to each channel,

in which the provisional-number-of-in-use-bits calculating means includes means for dividing data in the current frame into units of coding, means for normalizing data included in the units of coding using a number of scale factors, means for determining the provisional number of quantizing steps based on the number of scale factors, means for quantizing normalized data obtained from the means for normalizing on the basis of the provisional number of quantizing steps obtained from the means for determining the provisional number of quantizing steps, and means for entropy coding quantized normalized data obtained from

the means for quantizing normalized data and for obtaining the provisional number of in-use bits.

2. (previously presented) The encoding apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein:

the plurality of channels includes a plurality of group channels each including two or more channels;

the provisional-number-of-in-use-bits calculating means calculates the provisional number of in-use bits in each group channel; and

the inter-channel bit allocation means allocates the number of bits usable for each group channel based on a ratio of the provisional number of in-use bits for each group channel with the total provisional number of in-use bits, which is a sum of the provisional numbers of in-use bits for each group channel.

3. (currently amended) The encoding apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein the means for dividing data ~~provisional-number-of-in-use-bits-calculating means~~ transforms a time-axis signal into a frequency-axis signal and divides the frequency-axis signal into the units of coding, ~~quantizes the frequency axis signal, and performs entropy coding of the quantized signal.~~

4. (canceled)

5. (previously presented) The encoding apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein the inter-channel bit allocation means allocates a part of a total number of allocable bits as the number of usable bits corresponding to the ratio of the provisional number of in-use bits for each channel with the total provisional number of in-use bits for all the channels.

6. (original) The encoding apparatus as set forth in claim 5, wherein the inter-channel bit allocation means allocates other than the part of the total number of allocable bits evenly for each channel.

7. (original) The encoding apparatus as set forth in claim 5, wherein the inter-channel bit allocation means makes a proportional allocation of other than the part of the total number of allocable bits for each channel correspondingly to a code length in which each digital signal is encoded without being compressed.

8. (previously presented) The encoding apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein the digital signals are digital audio signals.

9. (currently amended) An encoding method of encoding for compression a multi-channel signal including digital signals from a plurality of channels by framing the multi-channel signal, determining a number of steps of quantizing data in the frame, and performing entropy coding of the digital signals, the method comprising the steps of:

calculating a sum of code length in a current frame as a provisional number of in-use bits for each channel of the plurality of channels by performing entropy coding of the digital signals based on a provisional number of quantizing steps provisionally determined for quantizing the digital signals;

allocating a number of bits usable for each channel based on a ratio of the provisional number of in-use bits for each channel with a total provisional number of in-use bits, which is a sum of the provisional numbers of in-use bits for all the plurality of channels, and

adjusting the number of in-use bits based on the number of usable bits allocated to each channel,

in which the calculating step includes dividing data in the current frame into units of coding, normalizing data included in the units of coding using a number of scale factors to obtain normalized data, determining the provisional number of quantizing steps based on the number of scale factors, quantizing the normalized data on the basis of the determined provisional number of quantizing steps to obtain quantized normalized data, and entropy coding the quantized normalized data and obtaining the provisional number of in-use bits.

10. (previously presented) The encoding method as set forth in claim 9, wherein:

the plurality of channels includes a plurality of group channels each including two or more channels;

the provisional number of in-use bits in each group channel is calculated in the provisional-number-of-in-use-bits calculating step; and

the number of bits usable for each group channel based on a ratio of the provisional number of in-use bits for each group channel with the total provisional number of in-use bits, which is a sum of the provisional numbers of in-use bits for each group channel, is allocated in the inter-channel bit allocation step.

11. (currently amended) The encoding method as set forth in claim 9, wherein in the provisional-number-of-in-use-bits calculating step, a time-axis signal is transformed into a frequency-axis signal and the frequency-axis signal is divided into the units of coding, ~~the frequency axis signal is quantized, and entropy coding of the quantized signal is performed.~~

12. (canceled)

13. (previously presented) The encoding method as set forth in claim 9, wherein in the inter-channel bit allocation step, a part of the total number of allocable bits is allocated as the number of usable bits corresponding to the ratio of the provisional number of in-use bits for each channel with the total provisional number of in-use bits for all the plurality of channels.

14. (original) The encoding method as set forth in claim 13, wherein in the inter-channel bit allocation step, there is allocated other than the part of the total number of allocable bits evenly for each channel.

15. (original) The encoding method as set forth in claim 13, wherein in the inter-channel bit allocation step, there is made a proportional allocation of other than the part of the total number of allocable bits for each channel correspondingly to a code length in which each digital signal is encoded without being compressed.

16. (previously presented) The encoding method as set forth in claim 9, wherein the digital signals are a digital audio signals.

17. (currently amended) A program recorded on a recording medium for allowing a computer to encode for compression a multi-channel signal including digital signals from a plurality of channels by framing the multi-channel signal, determining a number of steps of quantizing data in the frame, and performing

entropy coding of the signals, the program comprising the digital steps of:

calculating a sum of code length in a current frame as a provisional number of in-use bits for each channel of the plurality of channels by entropy coding of the digital signals based on a provisional number of quantizing steps provisionally determined for quantizing the digital signals;

allocating a number of bits usable for each channel based on a ratio of a provisional number of in-use bits for each channel with the total provisional number of in-use bits, which is a sum of the provisional numbers of in-use bits for all the plurality of channels, and

adjusting the number of in-use bits based on the number of usable bits allocated to each channel,

in which the calculating step includes dividing data in the current frame into units of coding, normalizing data included in the units of coding using a number of scale factors to obtain normalized data, determining the provisional number of quantizing steps based on the number of scale factors, quantizing the normalized data on the basis of the determined provisional number of quantizing steps to obtain quantized normalized data, and entropy coding the quantized normalized data and obtaining the provisional number of in-use bits.